News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Friday, August 11, 2006

Sexually Transmitted Disease Infections Up Sharply

CHEYENNE – Wyoming Department of Health officials are reporting a sharp increase this year in cases of sexually transmitted diseases following several years of steady growth in Wyoming.

"What's especially alarming is there were 744 cases of chlamydia reported just from January 1 through June 30 of this year," said Greg Welch, STD and hepatitis project coordinator for the Wyoming Department of Health. "If this trend continues, we could see more than 1400 cases for the year, which will be an all-time high and an increase of more than 25 percent over 2005." The numbers of cases of chlamydia infections in the state has increased at a rate of 5 - 10 percent each year for the past six years from 787 cases in 1999 to 1173 cases in 2005.

"While gonorrhea cases occur far less frequently than chlamydia, the numbers of reported cases have climbed dramatically over the past three years," Welch continued. There were 53 total cases in 2000 and 86 in 2005. During the first six months of this year, 68 cases of gonorrhea have already been diagnosed. "If this trend continues, it could also be an all-time high with an increase of 65 percent over last year," Welch said.

Welch noted these statistics represent the cases reported to the Department of Health, and actual infection rates are likely higher.

One factor affecting the spread of these diseases has likely been methamphetamine use. "Meth use can lead to high-risk sexual behavior such as unprotected sex and multiple sex partners, and locating patients and partners involved with meth is especially difficult," Welch said. "There have been two recent outbreaks of gonorrhea linked to methamphetamine use in Laramie and Natrona counties within the past nine months."

Both men and women can be infected with either or both infections at the same time without any signs or symptoms and may unknowingly pass on the infections. When symptoms show up later (three- six months following infection) they can be quite painful, frequently requiring hospitalization, and can result in partial or total sterility in both men and women.

"People need to be aware of the risks associated with certain behaviors. It's important to protect yourself," Welch said.

The Department of Health's STD/Infertility Prevention Program plans to work closely with private medical providers to develop new strategies to help reduce the growth of STD cases in Wyoming's communities.

People who think they may be at risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases can seek help through their local community health agency, public health nurse or their private healthcare provider. Individuals may also call the Wyoming Department of Health at 307-777-5932 for assistance and/or referral for services.

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